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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001686

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR (DAS BRYZA), EUR/ACE (ADAMS) AND  
EUR/CACEN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/16/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [AM](#)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR PRESSES KOCHARIAN TO SUPPORT USG  
DEMOCRATIZATION ACTIVITIES

Classified By: Ambassador John M. Evans for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

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1. (S) On 15 September, the Ambassador met with President Kocharian for just over an hour, at our request, primarily to discuss the USG's upcoming push for free and fair elections in Armenia in 2007 (parliamentary) and 2008 (presidential). The Ambassador opened the meeting by thanking Kocharian for Armenia's contribution to the Katrina relief effort. The Ambassador then stressed the importance of conducting a free and fair referendum in November on Armenia's constitutional amendments. Next, the Ambassador presented USG plans for assistance to support free and fair elections in 2007 and 2008, and Kocharian signaled his endorsement of such efforts.

In these connections, the Ambassador pointed out that improved democracy performance in Armenia was not only important to Kocharian's legacy, but also to Armenia's continuing eligibility for MCA (Millennium Challenge Account) resources. Following a brief discussion of the generally positive outcome of the Kocharian-Aliyev conversations in Kazan, the Ambassador and Kocharian discussed the upcoming USATF (Assistance Task Force) meeting in Washington. USAID Director Robin Phillips participated. END SUMMARY.

KATRINA CONTRIBUTION

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2. (U) The Ambassador opened the meeting by expressing President Bush's thanks for Armenia's offer of search and rescue forces, and the \$200,000 cash donation to support the U.S. in the Katrina relief effort. The Ambassador indicated that, although the former offer was not taken up, the USG very much appreciated both. Kocharian said it was a small gesture, and pointed out that global climate change appeared to be negatively affecting many countries.

SUPPORTING DEMOCRACY-BUILDING

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3. (S) The Ambassador reminded Kocharian that the Council of Europe, The European Union, the OSCE, and the Embassy had recently supported Kocharian's government's proposed constitutional amendments, including the Ambassador's local op-ed piece on the subject. The Ambassador also mentioned that he had met individually with a number of key leaders of opposition parties to attempt to persuade them of the merits of supporting the constitutional amendments, and to tell them that it is important to get the "rules of the game" established, and to then fight the good political fight on the basis of those rules. The Ambassador also listed three possible outcomes of the November referendum on the amendments: (a) the amendments pass with a fair and free referendum; (b) the amendments do not pass; or (c) the amendments pass, but with irregularities in the conduct of the referendum, followed by demonstrations, possible provocations and police overreaction to them. The Ambassador said this third outcome would be decidedly bad for Armenia and its international reputation, and could jeopardize the future of any MCA compact. Kocharian responded that he had little to lose with either the first or second outcome, so that there was no need to consider the third as a possibility. He also said that he was above directing any inappropriate intervention in the referendum. The Ambassador responded that even inappropriate intervention by lower-level government forces could tarnish the government's image and set things back.

4. (S) The Ambassador then unveiled our proposed USG-funded plan to support Armenia's 2007 (parliamentary) and 2008 (presidential) elections, handing Kocharian a one-page summary of the program. The Ambassador stressed that a key element to the success of the program would be developing an accurate voters' registry, and said that those in the GOAM currently working on such a registry (elements of OVIR and the police) have thus far rebuffed offers of external technical assistance. Kocharian strongly endorsed an accurate registry, and on the spot directed his attendant personal advisor to be in touch with the authorities now working on the registry to discuss the USG assistance with US experts next week.

15. (S) Kocharian expressed concern regarding NDI's (the National Democratic Institute's) implementing the proposed election support program. (COMMENT: Embassy believes that Kocharian's concern is partially related to frequent press speculation, here and elsewhere, that NDI has figured prominently in the region's recent "revolutions". END COMMENT.) The Ambassador responded that the proposed program would be implemented not only by NDI, but also by IRI (the International Republican Institute) and IFES (the International Foundation for Electoral Systems). The Ambassador also reminded Kocharian that the Embassy had frequently gone on the record saying that Armenia must build and perfect its democracy through hard work within the law, not resorting to "revolution," and that all elements of the USG were in accord on this. Kocharian complained that the opposition constantly stated, and seemed to believe, that NDI's "support for revolution" was a subtext of U.S. policy here. To this, the Ambassador responded that in his contacts with the opposition, he had made it very clear that the USG was not seeking to foment revolution in Armenia.

16. (S) The Ambassador also mentioned that for FY 2006, it appeared that Armenia may fare less well on some of the "Ruling Justly" MCA (Millennium Challenge Account) indicators than in the two preceding years, and suggested that USAID Director Phillips brief the President on this point in greater detail. Kocharian was interested in this aspect, and appeared to absorb this indication that Armenia may not be performing as well as he had thought previously. The Ambassador stated that an honest constitutional amendment referendum, and clear GOAM moves toward free and fair elections in 2007 and 2008 was what was needed in this context. The Ambassador repeated that the United States wanted to help Armenia achieve the goal of holding free and fair elections in 2007, and urged Kocharian to identify himself with our efforts. He noted that, on May 11, Azerbaijani President Aliyev had issued a special decree on free and fair elections, and that this might be something to think about also for Armenia.

KAZAN  
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17. (S) The Ambassador said readouts he had had on the Kazan meeting indicated that Kocharian had shown some flexibility, which had been noticed. Kocharian responded that he had opted for a "waiting period," because he believed that President Aliyev was currently assuming a more reasonable negotiating position on Nagorno-Karabakh only because of the November elections in Azerbaijan. Kocharian said it would be necessary to wait until after those elections to see what Aliyev's true intentions were. The Ambassador and Kocharian agreed that there seemed indeed to be a window for possible forward movement in 2006, before the Armenian political scene started to heat up in the lead-up to the 2007 elections.

ASSISTANCE AND REFORMS  
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18. (S) Finally, the Ambassador indicated that he and USAID Director Phillips would be in Washington next week, for the USATF meeting, and asked if Kocharian had any message to convey to Washington. Kocharian said he would be meeting with the Armenian delegation to the USATF before their departure. He reiterated his commitment to reforms and thanked the U.S. Government, and USAID in particular, for their assistance over the years. Kocharian ended the meeting by saying that he was not the kind of person who said things in order to be liked; he was direct and frank, and always appreciated it when one could have a candid and forthright exchange of views.

EVANS